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ABSTRACT

This book presents a range of views on the concept of the native speaker, considering psycholinguistic, linguistic, and sociolinguistic aspects. It examines the Critical Period Hypothesis; the role of the standard language; the kinds of knowledge (metalinguistic, discriminating, communicational, and skills) that the native speaker possesses; and the importance of communicative competence in enabling the native speaker to use language felicitously. While the native speaker may be intelligible to other native speakers, this mutual intelligibility depends in part on attitudinal factors. Loss of a heritage language (and the related spread of World Englishes) raises doubts about identity, while recent empirical work in second language acquisition and in language assessment questions the conventional view of ultimate attainment. The book concludes that, with the exception of early childhood exposure, all characteristics of the native speaker are contingent. It suggests that it is possible for those contingent characteristics (e.g., grammatical institutions and creativity) to be acquired without substantive early exposure, although this is difficult and rare. The book concludes that the fundamental opposition between native and non-native speakers is one of power, with native speaker membership determined by the non-native speaker's willingness to assume confidence and identity. (Contains approximately 300 references.) (SM)

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